



HON. PEDRO R. PIERLUISI
Statement on Hearing on
National Prison Rape Elimination Commission
Committee on the Judiciary
Wednesday, July 8, 2009

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I very much appreciate your convening this hearing to discuss an important, but often neglected, subject.

Rape and sexual assault are destructive forces in our society. Victims bear scars that are psychological, emotional, and physical—and that often last a lifetime.

Our society rightfully condemns rape and sexual assault and provides support services to victims. However, until recently, our government paid too little attention to the occurrence of these crimes in prisons. This is both wrong and counter-productive. It is wrong because no person—including a convicted criminal—deserves to be subjected to sexual abuse. It is counter-productive because a primary function of our criminal justice system is to rehabilitate those who are incarcerated. We should do everything in our power to turn inmates into productive, law-abiding citizens so that they do not return to prison. I understand that research indicates, not surprisingly, that individuals who are abused while in prison have difficulty integrating back into their communities and maintaining regular employment after their release. The costs of abuse are thus borne not only by the victim but by our entire society.

The report issued in June by the National Prison Rape Elimination Commission describes the extent and seriousness of prison rape and proposes standards and best practices that can be applied to all prisons. I am eager to hear our panelists' views on the report's findings and recommendations. I am particularly interested in how we can change the culture that too often allows abuse to be perpetrated within our prisons. The report found that the leadership of a prison has a substantial impact on the rate of abuse that occurs within that facility. In light of this finding, I ask: How can we in Congress legislate incentives for corrections leaders to prevent abuse from occurring? Although we must provide abuse victims with the legal tools to hold their perpetrators accountable, I believe we will do more to solve the problem of prison abuse if we focus on prevention by changing the ways in which our prisons are run.

I thank the panelists for joining us today and look forward to their testimony.